

UNDISCLOSED, the State v. Chester Hollman III
Episode 4 - YZA
February 26, 2018

[0:20] Colin Miller: In the movie *Star Wars*, Obi Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker fly into Mos Eisley spaceport with R2D2 and C3PO in tow. Upon arrival, they run into some Stormtroopers looking for their droid companions. To get out of this pickle, Obi-Wan makes use of a Jedi mind trick:

Stormtrooper:

Let me see your identification.

Obi Wan:

You don't need to see his identification.

Stormtrooper:

We don't need to see his identification.

Obi Wan:

These aren't the droids you're looking for.

Stormtrooper:

These aren't the droids we're looking for.

[0:48] Colin Miller: In recent years, "These aren't the droids you're looking for," has become a popular internet meme. According to knowyourmeme.com, it's "a catchphrase often used to humorously assert that an object or statement is not representing what it appears to represent." For example, Urban Dictionary uses the example of Jim saying, "Dude, that hot chick walking over here is checking me out hard," and Steve responding, "Um, these aren't the droids you're looking for. That's my girlfriend, dude."

The meme has even found its way into courtrooms. In People v. Cooper, the defense tried to claim that Edward Cooper wasn't the one driving a motorcycle that was being driven recklessly despite strong evidence to the contrary. In closing, the prosecutor argued:

"The defense in this case is—and I'm loathe to use movie references, I'm hoping at least some of you understand this one, it is pretty good—is the Jedi mind trick.

That is the defense. These aren't the droids you're looking for. This is the evidence. That is the argument, 'This isn't the driver.'"

In rejecting Cooper's ensuing appeal, the court held that While perhaps overly flippant, we do not find this to be an egregious denigration of the defense in this case. In fact, the instant case did boil down to the prosecutor insisting that defendant was the driver of the motorcycle, while defendant asserted he was not the driver of the motorcycle."

It's easy to imagine the prosecutor making a similar argument in the Chester Hollman case. After all, Deirdre Jones and he was arrested in a White Chevy Blazer with a license plate that started with the letters YZA shortly after an eyewitness had seen the assailant enter a similar vehicle soon after the shooting of Tae Jung Ho. But, over the course of this investigation, we've uncovered evidence that's led us to believe, against seemingly all odds, that these weren't the droids the police were looking for.

[2:40] Rabia Chaudry: In last week's episode we covered the decades of appeals, motions and petitions filed by Chester and his team, all of which came to naught. When the two star witnesses in the case, Deirdre Jones and Andre Dawkins, recanted their statements, Chester surely thought, "this is it, this has to be it," and yet even that failed. A judge found Jones' recantation to not be credible - in other words, she thought she was lying.

Alan Tauber:

The hard part in these issues, the hard part in these cases, is to convince a judge that the witness is testifying truthfully *now*, and in our case, the judge just simply rendered a decision that she didn't believe Deidre's testimony now. Uh, and dismissed the appeal. It's technically known as a petition, a Post Conviction Relief Act Petition, in effect it's an appeal, so she dismissed that, and that decision, that credibility determination, whether or not a witness is being honest or not is not something that the courts of appeal, on review, or the higher courts will, uh, disturb. They almost, by law, have to accept the decision, the trial court's decision, on whether or not the witness is being honest or not.

[3:55] Rabia Chaudry: So when it comes to the recantation of Deirdre Jones, the issue is effectively dead in the courts. You might recall, Chester had filed a number of earlier PCRA's before Deirdre, including one based on the Dawkins recantation and that was denied too. So, both of these major pieces of new evidence got him nowhere.

Now, would it be possible for him to raise a new PCRA? Only if he found more new evidence that could have changed the outcome of his trial: new evidence of police misconduct, a Brady violation, his innocence, or perhaps...someone else's guilt.

Hi and welcome... to Undisclosed. The State V. Chester Hollman III. My name is Rabia Chaudry, I'm an attorney and author, and I'm here with my colleagues Susan Simpson, and Colin Miller.

[4:36] Susan Simpson: Hi, I'm Susan Simpson. I blog @theViewFromLL2, and I also podcast with Rabia @the45th.

[4:42] Colin Miller: Hi, this is Colin Miller, I'm an Associate Dean and Professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law, and I blog @EvidenceProfBlog.

[6:19]: Susan Simpson: While a court of law may not have believed Deirdre Jones, let's be real - both Jones and Detective Baker cannot be telling the truth. One of them is lying. And there is also Dawkins, who says that he, too was threatened, coerced, promised leniency if he gave the statement he gave, and not just by the police but also by the prosecutor who was a legend in his time, Roger King.

King died a couple years back in 2016, after a thirty year career as a strongman prosecutor in Philadelphia. In an article written after his death, the Philadelphia Inquirer called him larger than life, noting his towering figure, both literally and metaphorically, as Philly's top homicide prosecutor.

[7:05] Celeste Trusty:

Roger King, who um, is the one who prosecuted Chester, he was notorious for doing this. He actually walked around with three bodyguards, he walked around with a gun...

[7:16] Susan Simpson: He was respected and feared, and not for nothing - he had retired having broken the record for the most death penalty convictions ever in the entire state, sixteen of them, a whopping 20% of all death sentences imposed in PA during his time. He had earned his reputation as the Babe Ruth of prosecutors.

But at least seven of those men he got death penalty convictions for may have been innocent, and in numerous cases allegations have arisen that King knew it, or at least withheld evidence that pointed to their innocence. In 1994 a defendant named William Nieves was successfully prosecuted for murder by King, and ended up on death row. In

2000, he was exonerated, when it was shown that a witness statement exculpating him was withheld from the defense by King. It took him a long time to secure his freedom, but while in prison Nieves had ended up contracting hepatitis, and in 2005 he died from liver failure, just five years after winning his freedom.

[8:09] Colin Miller: James Dennis, another man prosecuted for murder by King, was given a new trial in 2006 when he was able to show that King had not just withheld evidence of an alibi, but also evidence that pointed to the real killer.

A third man, Frederick Thomas, prosecuted and sent to death row by King in 1993, was granted a new trial in 2002 when two eyewitnesses recanted their testimony and a lead officer in the case, who the defense said framed Thomas, was convicted on corruption charges arising out of his conduct in other cases, which included falsifying police reports and making false arrests.

A similarity between these three cases, other than Roger King being the prosecutor, was that they were all convicted on shaky eyewitness testimony and without any forensic evidence. Just like in Chester Hollman's case.

One of the most famously egregious incidences of misconduct by King was his prosecution of four men in what is known as the "Lex Street Massacre", when ten people were shot in a Philadelphia crack house in December 2000. Seven of them died. It was the worst mass murder the city had ever seen.

Charges were quickly brought against a group of four men, who maintained their innocence. There was no physical evidence linking them to the crime and King allegedly coerced one defendant to give a false confession. And though King apparently had information pointing to four other suspects, he refused to release the group he had brought charges on initially. They sat in prison for 19 months before being released and all charges dropped. The men went on to sue the city for their wrongful imprisonment and won 1.9 million dollars.

[9:47] Rabia Chaudry: So yeah, these are just a few of the cases in which defendants have been able to prove misconduct by King. So I can only imagine how many more there are in which a defendant can't prove it. And these are only some of the death row cases, there are many hundreds more that King prosecuted that were not death penalty cases.

So given the track record of King and officers in Chester's case, if I have to believe either the witnesses or the officials, Deirdre or Detective Baker, well, my bets are on those who had nothing to gain, and plenty to lose, by coming forward all these years later.

It can be hard to judge sometimes if the police or prosecutors act in ethically questionable ways out of corruption, bad faith, or with a sincere belief they have the right person and because they are dealing with bad actors, they also have to act a little bad to get the conviction.

From the very beginning, I found it understandable that Chester and Deirdre were the prime suspects. The cops were looking for four young black people in a white Chevy blazer with tags starting with the letters YZA. And, minutes after the crime, and not too far away, along come Chester and Deirdre, two young black people, in a white Chevy blazer with tags starting with YZA.

So yeah, totally understandable. But what the police were about to learn soon after would make it harder to understand why they charged Chester in the crime. The car that Chester was driving, as we mentioned earlier in the series, didn't belong to him. It was his roommates, who was away for a few days and told him he could drive it. But it also didn't belong to his roommate, Shaun Boyce. It belonged to Alamo Rental Car. And the police knew that immediately, because records show they went to interview Patricia Laws, an Alamo administrative clerk, the morning after the murder around 10:30 am.

We'll get back to that interview in a bit, but first let's back up to see exactly what was happening at this Alamo, because there was a lot of shady stuff going on.

[11:40] Susan Simpson: Apparently it was not uncommon for people to rent vehicles continuously, renting one out, bringing it back in and then, checking another one out at the same time, or renting multiple cars at the same time. A... unusual thing to do, for lots of people, but, they'd rent them using names and credit cards of other people to get the car out and then paying cash upon return. IF the car was returned, because sometimes the cars weren't.

In his initial police statement Chester told the cops that the car was his roommates, who was dating a girl who worked at Alamo and he thought maybe the Blazer was stolen inventory. He was referring to cars that got rented and never returned, and then written off as losses.

This is not a new con and it's not one that's gone away in the years since Chester's conviction. In 2016, the Philly police department busted a massive auto theft ring that operated an elaborate scheme: two men had set up a company that only existed on paper, called Cheap Auto, which bought cars from online auctions. They and their co-conspirators would strip the cars of their VIN numbers and transfer them to stolen cars, doctor registrations, fake inspections, and then sell them. The unsuspecting buyers had no idea that they were purchasing cars that had been stolen from half a dozen different car rental companies, including Alamo. And it was a huge bust - in all 32 people were charged in connection with the scam, and none of them, from the publicly available records, seem to have been employees of the rental companies themselves, but back in 1991 it seems pretty clear that some of the Alamo employees were in on all aspects of the scam.

[13:08] Susan Simpson: The same day as the murder, the police go to the Alamo, and they talk to a woman named Patricia Laws. However, the interview doesn't really turn up anything about, you know, the car rental scam shadiness, or really anything much at all. They don't learn much. And in fact, they don't even ask her about Chester, or the white Chevy Blazer. Instead she is asked if she ever rented a Cadillac Seville to a man named Joseph McCue on the day before the murder. She said yeah, and said he was a white man. Then they asked her if he had come into the rental shop with anyone else and she said she didn't think so. And that was the extent of it, that was the end of the interview, not a single question that seems relevant to the actual crime. We still don't know what to make of it or who the heck Joseph McCue is. The next time police interviewed an Alamo employee was not until August 30, 1991, ten days later.

[14:10] Colin Miller: Sharon Wilderson, the woman Chester thought his roommate Shawn Boyce was dating, was grilled pretty well by the detectives, and in that interview Sharon admitted that as an Alamo employee she would rent out cars to people that she knew were presenting credentials that weren't their own. If she could enter a name, driver's license and credit card number given to her, she didn't always care if they matched up to the person standing at the counter, the one who would actually drive away with the car. Her reasoning seems to be that they would pay with cash upon return anyway, so these were just formalities. Also, she openly admitted in her statement that she would get some pocket cash for looking the other way.

Sharon was asked if she knew Shawn, if she had seen him around Alamo, if she had rented to him. She said yes, she knew him, had even gotten rides from him, but that she wasn't dating him. And yes, he came in there multiple times to rent cars, often with someone else, often with some third party's credentials to do it. And he and other men

he had come with had given her cash a couple of times, presumably to keep quiet about how they were renting the cars.

Sharon was shown a receipt for a Chevy Blazer that was rented on August 14, 1991, about a week before the murder. It was rented to someone by the name of John Kormack. She said she didn't recall, even though the documents showed she was the one who had rented the vehicle out. A bit later she is asked if she remembers renting a Blazer out to Shawn, and she did, in mid-August. He had come in with a friend, who provided his driver's license she said, and signed for the car.

Now what she may have been forgetting as she spoke to the police, or what she was pretending to forget, was that that the friend that signed the Blazer out had the name of John Kormack. The problem here is that John Kormack, whose license number and credit card were used to rent the Blazer, was an executive at Comcast Cable. More precisely, as the Alamo note mentions, a white executive who had nothing to do with the rental and told the police his credit card had not been stolen. Now remember, the cards would be used to take the vehicles out, but not used to pay for them.

Sharon also remembered Shawn coming in about a month or two prior to the murder, in June or July, to rent out a Cadillac Seville a few times. The day that Shawn let Chester borrow the Blazer, he also had a Seville rented out at the same time. It seems like he liked to have a Caddy to drive fairly frequently.

Sharon recalled a few times that Shawn came in, to get the Caddy and the Blazer, there was another man with him. They were always different men she said, but all in their twenties, around 5'5" or 5'6", medium builds, but she wasn't sure if she could recognize them if she saw them. Earlier in the interview she was shown a photograph of Chester Hollman, and she said no, she didn't know him, had never seen him before.

[16:36] Rabia Chaudry: On the night of the murder, Chester was driving the Chevy Blazer given to him by Shawn Boyce, rented out in the name of the Comcast executive John Kormack. But it wasn't the only white Chevy Blazer that Alamo owned - they actually had four in total, and three of those four were definitely rented out when Tae Jung Ho was killed.

And here is the kicker:

[16:55] Dennis Crosson:

As we researched Alamo Car Rental, we realized that all...they had three Chevy Blazers that were rented that night, ok, all bearing the same three letters on the tag, YZA. It was like, I guess, their fleet they use...all the licenses had that number on them.

[17:15] Rabia Chaudry: Yes, you heard right. All the Alamo owned white Chevy Blazers had tags starting with the letters YZA. That, by the way, was PI Dennis Crosson, who has been the lead defense investigator on the case, working with the Hollmans for years. He's the one who got the recantations from Dawkins and Jones.

Now remember, those are the only parts of the tag on the getaway vehicle the cab driver, Henderson, saw and noted that night. He never mentioned, because it seems he never quite caught it, the rest of the tag number. If he had, Chester likely wouldn't be in prison today.

So that means we've got three other possible vehicles that could have been the getaway car that night so let's go through them.

The first one, we kind of can eliminate. It was a Blazer with the tags YZA813. It was, according to the Alamo records, rented out on August 20, the day of the murder. But remember the murder took place around 1am, it was the 20th but the day was just beginning. This car wasn't rented out until 4pm that day, about 15 hours after the murder. So unless we are missing documents to show this Blazer had been out the night before, returned, cleaned, and then rented again in that 15 hour period, it is probably not the car in question. But we can't say that for sure, because we only know this car existed thanks to the trial testimony of an Alamo employee, Jay Barsky. I can't find any documentation in the records that we have about the car otherwise, not when it was last rented, not who rented it out on that day, not when it was returned, nothing more other than, well, it doesn't look like it was out on the road at the time of the murder.

So, moving on to the three cars that were on the road when Tae Jung was killed - there was the one Chester was driving, which then leaves two. And one of them, oddly enough, was actually being driven by Sharon Wilderson, the Alamo employee, herself.

According to her police interview, Sharon had in her possession a white Chevy Blazer with the tags YZA805. The car wasn't rented out in her name though. Here's what she had to say:

[19:18] Susan Simpson reading statement by Sharon Wilderson:

"I had a white Blazer from Alamo that Keith Williams, a friend of a guy I know as Carl. Keith rented the Blazer for me because my rental time as an employee for the company had run out. Carl told me that he would rent the Blazer out for me if I drove an out of town guest of his to Reading and then I could keep the car. But then Carl came in that evening and told me he would take his guest to Reading so I could keep the Blazer. That was a week before I was to go on vacation."

[19:40] Rabia Chaudry: Sharon goes on to say that on the evening of the 19th she left Philadelphia and drove to Landover, MD. From there, the next day she went to her sister's in Washington DC, and on the Wednesday the 21st, she flew to Jamaica. She returned the next week on August 27th. The Blazer that she had, according to the trial testimony again of Mr. Barsky, was returned the following day, on August 28th. But also, according to his testimony, it had been rented out the night before the murder, on the 19th. But if you recall from just a minute ago, Sharon said that she had gotten the car a week before she went on vacation, so something there doesn't add up. Unfortunately we don't have the rental records for that car to know exactly when it was taken out. We also can't be sure who rented it because Keith Williams could very well be another fake ID used to rent it. No one looked into who Carl is, so this lead kind of peters out here.

Whether she got the car the week before or the night before the murder, the point is that car was on the road. No one knows exactly where it was that night because as far as we know, no investigator looked into it at the time, and she never testified at trial.

[20:48] Susan Simpson: The police don't at all seem suspicious either, of her story and what she was doing with her Blazer, which is kind of odd, given her relationship with Shawn Boyce, who they did seem highly suspicious of. They had grilled Sharon pretty intensely about Shawn, about his rental habits, about the people he came in with, and about the kind of stuff he was involved in. Sharon told them she wasn't sure, but she thought he was a drug runner and that he told her he was going to sell one of the rented cars one day. She even said she was afraid of Shawn, she had heard him threaten others with violence.

So is it possible that Shawn Boyce and Sharon were together the night of the murder, and he was in her Blazer? Boyce has a rap sheet that's twenty-two entries long, including drug and assault charges. And Chester didn't have much nice to say about him either. They hadn't been living together long, and he didn't even know him very

well, but it was a way to save on rent, even though it ended up costing him in other ways.

[21:43] Dennis Crosson:

Chester wrote to me, and this all relates to what we were just talking about, he wrote to me and said that he had recently moved in with this guy Shawn Boyce. And he said about two weeks before this incident happened, and I don't think he even reported to this to anybody, but he went away for a couple of days, and he had left his service revolver, which I believe was a .38 caliber, in his closet or somewhere along with \$400. And when he came back, the gun was gone, and \$400 was gone.

[22:15] Susan Simpson: That's Dennis Crosson again, talking about an incident Chester told him about just a couple of years ago. Chester can't sure if Boyce stole his money and gun because there had been other people over at the apartment, but it's entirely possible that Boyce did. It would line up with some of the other things Chester had told Crosson over the years: that Shawn never paid the rent he owed, he was a freeloader, and that he was likely involved in drug running. And then there was a girl named Sonja that Shawn began dating but over time she became close to Chester. Shawn had developed some jealousy and joked with Chester that he had stolen his girl, though it wasn't true. And shortly after Chester was arrested, the same girl, Sonja Bishop, came to visit Chester in prison. She also brought a friend along.

[23:05] Dennis Crosson:

The summer of 2016 Chester wrote to me, and we started talking about these two girls that came to visit hm. Now, he spoke about this before, but you know I was dealing more with the immediate kind of things, and this was kind of like what...so I had the name of this girl, Sonja Bishop, which was one of the girls that came to visit, and he said they were very probative, and asking him a lot of questions, and it kind of sounded like it made him uncomfortable and they kind of like wanted to know what... So in the summer, I find this girl Sonja Bishop, and I call her up, I go to her house, and her son's living at the house but she's living somewhere else, but I get in touch with her. And I actually had three meetings with her. And everything went very nice, you know I'm like buying her dinner or something, so we're sitting there having kind of...so I'm asking her...she was dating Chester, so I'm asking her what kind of person ...I didn't say too much about this visit that she made and..but I met with her three times. And everything was very pleasant the first two times, until I started pushing her as to: she went with her girlfriend to visit him, and wherever they were holding him before trial,

probably when he was first arrested, might have been the house of correction, or one of those prisons that's closed up now. So the girlfriend I found out that she went with her is a girl named Anita. I never met with her and I don't know her last name, but she was dating Shawn Boyce's brother. And Sonja Bishop was dating Chester. At any rate, we started talking, and she gets me, well this girl Anita has a picture of Shawn Boyce in Facebook, which I have a copy of. I said "Great. Would you get me a copy". So it took a couple times you know, to get this girl to finally send me a copy, so when I started getting a little more probative as to why they were there asking him so many questions and whatever, she kind of got like real defensive, and actually I showed her a letter which I couldn't find but I know it's in my mess somewhere, that Chester had written, and it's, you know, asking about this girl, you know, why was she there, why was she asking...and the questions they were asking, was if he thought Shawn Boyce was involved in it.

[25:38] Susan Simpson: This visit made Chester pretty uncomfortable and set off some red flags for Crosson too - why did these girls think Shawn was involved and why were they grilling Chester for information? One possible explanation here is that Shawn had sent them to find out just what Chester knew. Another possibility is that they were just two curious young girls who wanted to get the 4-1-1.

So, if Shawn Boyce had been able to hook up with a Chevy Blazer the night of the murder, he could also be a strong suspect. After all, Tae Jung Ho was killed with a bullet from a .38, the very same kind of gun that was stolen from Chester's own closet.

[26:25] Colin Miller: That takes us to the last Chevy Blazer out on the road that night that had tags starting with the letters YZA. Its full tag was YZA789 and it was rented out by a young woman named Denise Combs.

Dennis Crosson:

One was rented to a girl: Denise Combs. So we did some background check on her, and saw that she was another, what we found out about her was that she was arrested for assaulting an Assistant District Attorney, in City Hall. [Mhm.] SO, I started looking into, well, why was she, what was she doing in City Hall? On the 600 Level, which is uh- where the murder cases are tried-- back then.

[26:59] Colin Miller: What was Denise doing at a murder trial? It turns out her brother, Jack Combs, was on trial for murder. On April 18, 1990 Denise ended up assaulting an Assistant DA when at the courthouse to attend a hearing on the murder charges her brother was facing.

Of course, the fact that Denise Combs had one of the White Chevy Blazers the night of the murder, and that her brother was facing murder charges, not one but two murders in the same time period, more than piqued our interest.

And it seems it slightly piqued the interest of detectives back in 1991 as they were investigating the case. The documents we have don't tell the entire story but on September 10, 1991, about a month after the murder, the police apparently retrieved rental records from Alamo reflecting all the different Blazer rentals for August 20th. Denise Combs' name came up showing she had a Blazer rented, not only for that night, but had rented a Blazer on May 20th for 35 days, then on June 28th for ten days, and then on July 14th for 38 days. That last rental, the one she had on the night of the murder, she returned to the Alamo lot on August 21st at 4:59 am, a little over 24 hours after Tae Jung Ho was killed.

So anyway, the police pull these records on Sept 10 th, find out there's a woman named Denise Combs with a Blazer and a criminal record, and less than two days later, on September 12th, detectives pick up Andre Dawkins and bring him into the station at 2am. He's there until 7:30 am, for over five hours, and in that time he's shown a photo array of young black women and asked if he recognizes anyone. He says one of them looks the woman who could have been the driver of the Blazer, and the photo he selects is none other than Denise Combs.

[28:45] Rabia Chaudry: Remember the cops already have Deirdre Jones pegged as the woman in the passenger seat, and she confessed too. But they still need a driver, and Denise Combs would seem to fit the bill. She has the long dark hair that a number of witnesses described in her mugshot from the previous year and certainly there could have had a bleach streak through it in 1991.

The problem is there is no documentation to show the police did anything further to investigate Denise Combs. It's just as strange that if all they wanted Andre Dawkins to do was take a look at a photo array, why did they keep him at the station for over five hours that night?

Well it may have had something to do with the fact that the preliminary hearing was the same day. Dawkins was released at 7:30 am and had to be in court not long after. And while he may have just potentially identified the driver of the getaway vehicle, it's never mentioned at the hearing. It could be that they kept him at the police station all that time

to make sure he didn't mention it. While his identification of Denise Combs was divulged to the defense in discovery, something else related to Combs wasn't.

In 2011, Alan Tauber, Chester's attorney, and PA Innocence Project Investigator, Shaina Tyler, gave Denise Combs a visit to ask her about that Blazer because it didn't look like anyone else had ever done so before the trial.

The report written after the visit stated the following:

[30:01] Colin Miller narrating:

Combs stated she recalled a Detective coming to her house one day inquiring about the vehicle she had rented, a white bronco. The detective looked at her license plate and told her that it did not match the plated he was looking for. He also told her that she did not fit the description of the suspect he was looking for. Combs did not sign any statements. Combs did not go to the police station and give a formal statement. Combs was not contacted by the detective again. Combs did not testify at trial.

[30:23] Rabia Chaudry: Just to reiterate, there are no records in our possession, and in the possession of Chester's defense team, indicating any police ever visited Denise Combs about this case. Could she be misremembering or making it up? I mean, it's possible, but I don't see any reason for her to insert herself into the case for no reason, and I see every reason for the police to have gone to check her out.

We don't have a date for this visit, but if a cop was visiting her to check the plates on a white truck she had rented, albeit a Blazer and not a Bronco, it seems likely it would have been soon after pulling the rental records from Alamo. But, was it before or after Dawkins identified her from the photo array? Did she still have the car on her when the cop came, or was it a different rental? There's just no way to know from what we have.

[31:10] Susan Simpson: So, when Tauber visited her in 2011, she apparently spent a bit of time discussing her brother's case with him. Jack Combs had been fighting his convictions, two convictions for two murders, and he'd maintained his innocence and his family believed him.

Getting into the cases would be, well, an entirely new series but suffice it to say that he could not have been one of the men who attacked Tae Jung because he was in prison the night of the murder. But that doesn't let Denise off the hook - she ran with a bit of a dangerous crowd and had a habit of renting multiple cars at the same time and giving

them to others to use. In fact, in 1990 her brother had been driving a car Denise had rented during the commission of one of the murders he was ultimately convicted of. And Alamo records show a car she rented in September of 1991 had ended up impounded by the cops after a man driving it was arrested. While we don't have a record of that man's name, the Alamo report says that he told the police that Denise Combs had given him the car.

Two instances doesn't make a pattern, necessarily, but it does certainly suggest a strong possibility that there could have been a third instance in which a car rented by Denise was used in a crime. The question then is who were the two men in the Blazer that night, the ones that actually attacked Tae Jung?

We know she dated an extremely dangerous man at one point, she told that to Tauber when he visited her. Her ex-boyfriend Donyell Paddy, Denise told him, would kill anyone. Women, children, witnesses, friends, anyone in his way he would shoot and kill. And even though he was in prison in 2011 when she told Tauber this, she was still terrified of him because she said he had the power to have people killed from inside prison. Denise called him a serial killer, saying he had over a hundred murders to his name and tried to have her son's father killed four times.

[32:54] Rabia Chaudry: Having looked at Paddy's records, I can confirm he seems highly dangerous, though 100 murders aren't exactly reflected in it. He certainly could have been one of the men in the Blazer except that, just like Denise's brother Jack, Paddy was in prison awaiting trial on a double homicide the night that Tae Jung was killed.

[33:10] Susan Simpson: So, yeah. That probably rules him out. And as we consider who could have been with Denise if she was in fact driving the getaway car, it just so happens that she had an additional driver listed on her Blazer rental. It was a man by the name of Jeffrey Green. Although, it's important to note that her brother Jack sometimes used the name Jeffrey Green as an alias. Green was a real person, though, and he happened to be their cousin. And he was someone with a criminal history, including robberies, back in the 90s.

Then there was a name that popped up a few times in connection to Jack Combs, a man named Kenneth Singer. Singer has a record that spans nearly two decades, mostly for theft, once even being arrested with Jack back in 1988. Singer, we recently learned, is also the father of Denise's child, the one that Paddy allegedly tried to kill four times. He is clearly close to the Combs family and it just so happens that he was not in prison

the night Tae Jung was killed. He doesn't have any violent crimes in his record, but could he have been the second man, the one who held down Tae Jung's legs and searched his pockets? Maybe. I mean, who knows because there are a lot of shady characters connected to Denise back in the early 1990s, and if she was the driver, it could be anyone's guess who the others in the car could have been.

[34:24] Rabia Chaudry: So we decided to see if we could find her again, after all these years, to get more information out of Denise.

I went in search of Denise with Celeste Trusty, who you heard from in the first episode of this series, and who has been helping investigate this case with me. We didn't know if this would work out and if she would talk to us because, after all, we were there because we thought she could be a suspect in a murder. But we also knew this - her only sibling Jack had maintained his innocence all these years, and she had spoken about him with Alan Tauber back in 2011, so we thought, well, what better way to get our foot in the door.

Denise Combs:

Wow, where are y'all from?

Celeste Trusty:

So, I actually do wrongful conviction investigations, on my own, I have a blog called "The Jury Room," um, but, anyway, I look into wrongful convictions out of Philadelphia, and I know that Jack has two Innocence Claims. So, I wanted to talk to you guys about the cases, see if there is anything that we can do to try to help...

Denise Combs:

Okay.

Celeste Trusty:

See if there is, you know, anything?

Denise Combs:

Come on, come on in, I'll get you all a couple chairs...

[35:27] Rabia Chaudry: Ok so we weren't telling the entire truth of why we were there, but we weren't lying either. I actually think Jack has a strong innocence claim on one of the murders he's in for. The second one, not so sure, but we were certainly curious

about his cases and open to discussing them -- with the hopes we could discuss Chester's case as well.

Denise wasn't home alone, her mom was there as well. And both of them were very eager to talk about Jack's cases. It was clear, and heartbreaking, that they both believed he was completely innocent and it had taken a devastating toll on them.

Denise Combs:

I used to cry, I was like, um- very depressed for like, ten years. I had to think of everything I could do for him, for like 10 years. Depression-- And I'm like... I used to go on the radio, we put on a march, I would not try- I was like, who is this girl who fights hard to get her brother home?

[36:23] Rabia Chaudry: I couldn't help but think about Deonna Hollman, Chester's only sibling as well, and how both of these sisters, Denise and Deonna, had been fighting the same fight for their brothers. And it also didn't escape me that one of these women may be responsible for the pain of the other.

We spent most of our time talking about Jack's two murder cases but eventually Celeste was able to pivot the conversation to Chester's case:

Celeste Trusty:

So... your name has come up in another, in other case, that I'm looking at, of course. And, you know, now that it's like, it's going to maybe help me a little bit, because ... now that I know--

Denise Combs:

My name??

Celeste Trusty:

Yeah, not-- you aren't the suspects! No, I'm sorry, another car that you rented-

Denise Combs:

Ohh.

Celeste Trusty:

...Uh, came up in another- in a murder.

Denise Combs:

I had police come to my house, when I was...

Celeste Trusty:

Do you know?

Denise Combs:

Mmmmmmm, '91? I'd say '91. I don't know. -- Um, they came to my house, about... a homicide.

Celeste Trusty:

Right.

Denise Combs:

And they, uh, checked my vehicle. They took the license plate down, and they said, somebody had my license plate that was in the homicide. And they took it, and, that was it.

Celeste Trusty:

Do you know what cop that was?

Denise Combs:

I have no idea. Not that time, I have no idea. Because it wasn't like... important to me.

Celeste Trusty:

Right. Right.

Rabia Chaudry:

And that was the end of it?

Denise Combs:

And that was the end of it.

Celeste Trusty:

And that was the end of it.

[37:34] Rabia Chaudry: That was pretty much it, she didn't want to say anything more about that incident because as far as she was concerned, it had nothing to do with her. I, however, left her home that night unable to shake the feeling that the Blazer used as the getaway vehicle in Tae Jung's murder, might have been hers and that she might have been the driver. The information she offered voluntarily a couple weeks later only confirmed my suspicion.

Denise and Celeste stayed in touch and not long after our visit, they met up again, this time with Zachary Stern from the Innocence Project joining them. As soon as they left the meeting, Celeste called me with some urgent news.

[38:07] Celeste Trusty:

Hi, how are you?

Rabia Chaudry:

Good, what's going on?

Celeste Trusty:

Um, I'm actually... I'm with Zach and we got to talk to Denise again...

Rabia Chaudry:

Ooh... okay...

Celeste Trusty:

And we wanted to tell you something she said. And (laughing) I think Zach wanted to hear your initial reaction also.

Zachary Stern:

I'm not a creep though Rabia!

Celeste Trusty:

(laughing) No, no. It's just. So we, we went in and talked to her, and uh...

Rabia Chaudry:

In person?

Celeste Trusty:

She was just.... In person!

Rabia Chaudry:

Okay.

Celeste Trusty:

Um, and she said Jeffrey Green and her were very, very close, blah, blah, blah. Which is great. But she said, um, that she used to have a .38...

Rabia Chaudry:

What?

Celeste Trusty:

And...uh huh! And she, so she...they grew up around guns, they always had guns. And in 1992, Homicide came to her house while her dad was there and they took em all down, they locked them all up overnight, whatever. And she told us that before that, she had *thrown out* the two guns she had, which was a .38 and a...what, .257?

Zachary Stern:

Yeah.

Celeste Trusty:

Because they might have a body on them!

Rabia Chaudry:

WHAT?!?

Zachary Stern:

Direct quote!

Celeste Trusty:

Direct quote!

Rabia Chaudry:

WHAT?!? (laughing)

Celeste Trusty:

Direct quote. She said, and she said that like, ya know, with her friends, that they would just give each other guns. Ya know, she'd pass guns along, blah, blah, blah. But she did have guns. She loved guns. And before 1992, so between, ya

know right around that time, she had a .38 and a .257. Said she threw them in a trash can before 1992 because -- ***they might have a body on them.***

[39:50] Colin Miller: So if the Blazer that was driven by the getaway driver isn't connected to Chester Hollman, that leaves us with two strong possibilities - the getaway vehicle might have been the Blazer that Sharon Wilderson had access to that night, or the Blazer that Denise Combs had that night. Both of these women either had access to a .38 or had access to someone who did. Both women were connected to men with criminal records. And we have no accounting of what either women was doing that night, at the time of the murder. If only the police had followed up on investigating either of them, they might have found that these women were connected or weren't connected, but there was little incentive to do so when they had already made their arrests and gotten confessions immediately. What were they supposed to do, drop the charges, admit the confessions were false?

In any event, none of what we've learned about Denise Combs, I am fairly confident, is enough evidence to get Chester one more shot at a PCRA petition. But he has another shot elsewhere, outside of the courts, with the Philadelphia Conviction Integrity Unit.

Last week, Chester's attorney filed an application with the Unit, which has now been kicked into overdrive with Larry Krasner's appointment of Patricia Cummings as the new head of the unit. Cummings, a former defense attorney, comes to the job from the Dallas County DA's conviction integrity unit, and is nationally known for her work on behalf of the wrongfully convicted.

Chester's filing is eight pages long and requests that the CIU open a full investigation and review of Chester's conviction, citing the witness recantations, Denise Comb's probability as a suspect, and Chester's never wavering from his claim of innocence.

That claim is so strong that when Chester was offered a plea deal to drastically reduce his sentence if he provided the name of the shooter he refused it. He didn't know who the shooter was because he wasn't involved. His attorney at the time suggested he offer up any name, but Chester said no and that lawyer withdrew from the case.

[41:34] Susan Simpson: Years later, long after Chester was convicted, the prosecutor originally assigned to the case, Hugh Houlihan, visited Chester in prison along with one of the detectives from the case, Detective Witcher. He made Chester an offer - if he offered up the name of the shooter, he'd recommend clemency for him in a petition to the governor. Chester, who was serving a life sentence then and now, again declined.

He couldn't give him the name of the shooter because he had no idea who the shooter was.

All of this and more are included in Chester's application to the CIU, it's one of his last best shots. I say "one of" because there is still another possibility, and that's this - that his homicide file is finally turned over because, if that's the case, that could potentially reveal Brady material.

There are many things missing from the documents that Chester's defense team has because, as we explained Shaurn Thomas's case last summer, a defendant doesn't have the right to the homicide file in Pennsylvania. When it comes to discovery, Pennsylvania is a ridiculously restrictive state, and this rule, which remains in effect even after a defendant's conviction, hogties defendants in the appellate process. It also, by the way, hogties the truth.

If it's truly the mission and charge of the state, the police, and prosecution, to seek the truth in order to serve justice, then there's no reason not to release homicide files. Other states do so, with none of the consequences that Pennsylvania says it fears will happen. It does seem like the real reason, or at least a very strong motivator that they have here, is that handing over the files would do something harmful to the State's case, and that shouldn't be a reason at all.

We know that there's a good chance that somewhere in those files there's material that would undermine the State's case and help Chester. For instance, the missing report from when the cops visited Denise Combs -- that's certainly something I'd like to see.

And then there's this: when Celeste visited Dennis Crosson, she got a copy of his file and noticed a glaring difference between the copy of Chester's police statement that was in his file for all these years, and the one that she had, which was labelled "Piree's copy".

The Crosson copy is the original, it's the one that defense counsel had all along, and it's handwritten the entire way down. Starting on the bottom of the second to last page is a near paragraph written by Detective Piree, yeah that's the same detective who punched Chester in the mouth, it says:

[43:56] (read by Rabia Chaudry):

"I want you to know there are witnesses outside being interviewed and have identified you and another male. You and another male, who robbed and shot

and killed and oriental college student at 1am today at 21st and Walnut Street. They also got your license plate number and identified you fleeing the robbery and body and you jumping into the rear open window and identified you and Deirdre in the vehicle several minutes after the shooting."

[44:20] Rabia Chaudry: Immediately after that is the portion in the interview record where Chester allegedly says, "Yes, I don't want to say anymore. I told that bitch to keep her mouth shut. Shit." Which is kind of a weird response to the paragraph before it.

And finally the next question says, "How were you treated by the police detectives?" And the answer is, "decently."

[44:45] Susan Simpson: But the copy Celeste had, the one labelled "Piree's Copy", it came from the courthouse as a part of the trial exhibits. It's not the same version the defense has. The large paragraph about witnesses seeing Chester in the original is erased. Instead there is a typewritten bit that seems to be pasted over top that reads:

[45:03] (read by Rabia Chaudry):

"At this time I showed Chester HOLLMAN three pages of a statement by Diedre JONES, he read the three pages and then stated."

And in closed parenthesis, "(go to the next page)"

Now the next page has that answer where Chester said, "I told that bitch to keep her mouth shut. Shit." And on the next page, in Piree's copy, there's no question and answer about how the detectives treated him.

[45:23] Susan Simpson: Piree was actually asked on the stand at the trial whether he showed Chester Deirdre's statements and he was very vehement in saying no, he hadn't. But what to make of the copy that spells out that, yeah he did? For the record, Chester recalls being shown something, some document, and being told it was Deirdre's statement. And it's hard to understand then why Piree lied about it, especially after going to the pain of altering the original to reflect exactly that.

[45:49] Rabia Chaudry: We don't know but the point here is -- if this document was altered, who knows how many others could be? Getting a hold of the homicide file is vital in this case, and really in any case these detectives and this prosecutor touched. Speaking of which, the new Philadelphia DA Larry Krasner has a list of suspect police officers and publicly acknowledged that prosecutors have been internally circulating a

secret list of more than two dozen officers whose corruption may have tainted their testimony in court. Once he has verified the charges against them, he has vowed to make that list public, which could open the doors to defendants getting a new chance if there was misconduct in their case.

And this is all great news for Philadelphia, and these are the changes that the Hollman's are hanging their hats on for now.

When I began reviewing the files last year I noticed portions of them highlighted with comments and assumed that these had been made by lawyers or investigators over the years. I was wrong.

[46:38] Celeste Trusty: So, after Chester was convicted, his family made these amazing binders to give out to anybody who would listen about the injustices being done to their son. You know, and I had already seen most of the documents that the binder contained, but it starts out with a note written by Chester's mom. You know, and as a mother, I cannot even imagine being in the position that Chester's mother was in, but reading the words that she wrote about this injustice, and reading the words...you know, her saying, "my son, my son," and it is just something that will sit with me for the rest of my life. And it kind of just adds, you know, something else to this case, because Chester's mother passed away in 1999. She had been very sick, she was on dialysis for many, many, many years, and she passed away just eight years after Chester was arrested for the murder that he didn't commit. Chester never got to say goodbye to his mother. His mother never got to say goodbye to him. You know, and that's something that....it's just something that they'll never, ever, ever get that back.

[47:48] Rabia Chaudry: If you saw these painstakingly written notations, the tabs, the careful examination of the files, it would break your heart because as sick as she was, Chester's mother fought for him until the very end. And when we sat with Denise Combs and her mother, who is also very elderly and sick, I couldn't help thinking they must be just as full of dread that their son, their brother, Jack Combs, won't make it home to see his mother before she passes as well.

The Philadelphia Inquirer story helped breathe new life into this case, but it couldn't have happened without the continued effort of the people who support Chester, including Alan Tauber, the attorney who has been by his side for nearly a decade, the Innocence Project, people like Celeste Trusty, and, of course, long time investigator turned friend Dennis Crosson.

[48:33] Dennis Crosson: This summer we started conducting some rallies, and, and we -- this is like a side story, and so we conducted a couple of rallies down in Center City across from City Hall and I encouraged the family -- let's make some t-shirts and posters. See this was after the article came out in the paper. Cause this is what I had...I had been to the Inquirer many, many times. I said, you gotta look at this story, you gotta write this story about this family that has been bankrupt through the criminal justice system, paying for attorneys and paying uh, you know, just legal fees. You know, Chester's father, he's, you know, he's an old man now. And I think when I first met him he was working three jobs and they spent like a ton of money through different lawyers. I said, I said the story here is how the criminal justice system has bankrupt these people. And they - they are...they are great people, they are strong, and strong, and strong...

[50:00] Rabia Chaudry: We are hoping that the Hollman family continues to stay strong knowing that there are many more now thinking about Chester and that the Undisclosed team will continue to follow this case, and the other Philadelphia cases that we've covered, and report on them. Having spent the past eight months or so reporting on cases out of Philadelphia has been eye-opening, and at times enraging, but seeing the changes there gives me hope. It's time now, though, for the Undisclosed team to move out of Philly, to a new place, a new city, a new state.

[50:29] Deonna Hollman: My mom said to my brother, and I remember sitting there one time, she said "a lie can only stand but so long." Now it's been almost thirty years, but, we know that it can only stand but so long...

Next time, on Undisclosed.

[50:54] Rabia Chaudry: A very big thank you to Chester Hollman III and his family for allowing us to cover his case. For Alan Tauber for working with us. For the Pennsylvania Innocence Project's Zachary Stern. For Celeste Trusty, who has been an amazing advocate for the wrongfully convicted, a wonderful investigator, and a diligent, committed person to this cause. I do want to urge all of our listeners to follow Celeste's work online. You can find her on Twitter. Her handle is @thejuryroomblog and you can find her blog at www.thejuryroom.org and also you can support her by becoming a patron of her work. If you find her online you will find the links and see how you can become a patron and I urge you to do that as well as also support the work of the Pennsylvania Innocence Project. I want to thank, as always, our executive producer Mital Telhan, Baluki for our logo, the amazing Rebecca LaVoie, host and producer of

Crime Writers On. A big thank you to all of our sponsors. You can follow us on social media - our handle is @UndisclosedPod. Don't forget to use the hashtag #UDAddendum to tag any questions you want us to answer. Thanks for listening. We look forward to returning with so many more cases for you this year.

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